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Agenda item 14

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS SEVENTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Andrew G. BANGALI (Sierra Leone)

Chapter ____

COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM

1. The Commission considered agenda item 11 at its 7th meeting, on 15 April 1991. It had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on the legal information services provided by the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations (E/C.10/1990/14) and on the activities of the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations and of the joint units established with the regional commissions (E/C.10/1990/15), which included information on the Centre's comprehensive information system.

2. In his introductory statement, the Deputy Executive Director of the Centre noted the critical importance of providing access to reliable data on the structure, activities and strategies of major international actors, such as transnational corporations, and also access to information on the policies, laws and measures of Governments in that regard.

3. He provided a résumé of the current and future activities of the Centre with respect to the macroeconomic, legal, contractual, corporate and bibliographic components of the information system. During the past year, the Centre had received and responded to as many as 2,500 requests for in-depth

information on various issues related to transnational corporations, which represented an increase of 25 per cent over the requests that had been registered in the previous year - an eloquent testimony to the increasing recognition by Governments of the importance of information in their decision-making processes.

4. Concerning the legal component of the Centre's information services, which was the focus of the report of the Secretary-General on the legal information services provided by the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations to developing countries (E/C.10/1991/14), the Deputy Executive Director gave examples of inquiries typically directed to the Centre in that area. He noted that the Centre responded to those requests by assembling, analysing and furnishing relevant information and data, where appropriate, or by establishing an advisory mission consisting of experts who advise on the entire range of options available to the country. Over the years, the Centre had compiled a body of legal information which revolved around the following categories: laws and regulations relating to foreign investment, transfer of technology and transnational corporations generally; contracts and other transactions involving transnational corporations; analytical studies on various legal issues or trends in transnational transactions; and secondary material on international business law.

5. He stated that a stable investment climate required specific measures of various kinds; the provision of appropriate, up-to-date information was a modest part of such measures.

6. One delegation expressed satisfaction with the progress made by the Centre in the collection and dissemination of information useful to the understanding of transnational corporations. It was of the opinion that the information provided by the Centre was critical to effective policy-making and the conclusion of satisfactory investment agreements. The delegation supported the development of databases of financial and textual information on companies, particularly small and medium-size transnational corporations, as well as the activities of the Centre in making its electronic information available at the national level through the installation of local systems.

7. The same delegation noted with satisfaction the progress made by the Centre in collecting and disseminating legal information; it considered, in particular, that the development of full text databases of national laws and regulations on foreign direct investment and transnational corporations would constitute an important support resource for member States. It was further noted that member States played a key role in establishing effective information disclosure mechanisms and expressed support for international action directed towards facilitating information access and dissemination in that area of economic activity.

Action taken by the Commission

8. The Commission took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the legal information services provided by the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations to developing countries (E/C.10/1991/14) and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Commission at its eighteenth session on the experience gained in the development of the comprehensive information system since its seventeenth session.